

Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996

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Fact Sheet

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Environmental Health

Programs

Division of Drinking Water

Background

The federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) was reauthorized by Congress in August, 1996 updating the original SDWA of 1974 and its 1986 amendments. The 1996 Amendments make extensive changes to some of the current requirements that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), states, and water systems have been trying to implement and/or comply with for the past 10 years. They were developed with unprecedented contributions from water utilities, organizations and state and local officials embodying a partnership approach that includes funding for states to assist water systems, particularly the smaller utilities, to comply with the SDWA.

The 1996 Amendments provide states with options, incentives and funding for several of the new mandated activities. Required activities include statewide source protection, system capacity, and operator certification programs. Optional and desirable program activities include the State Revolving Fund (SRF) program and increased monitoring waivers for water systems. Some of the major provisions of the amendments include standard setting, health research, consumer awareness and public notification, small system technologies, enforcement, and a number of specific drinking water standards/regulations. Nonetheless, the 1996 Amendments still represent significant challenges and impacts to EPA, states and all federally regulated (Group A) public water systems. The following are key areas that DOH expects to focus on in Washington.

Source Water Assessment/Greater Monitoring Flexibility

DOH has already elected to pursue the waiver approach with water systems and provide greater monitoring flexibility where there is no increased risk to public health. DOH and water systems will be able to focus resources on the most pressing water quality needs. Our ability to do this will first require a comprehensive statewide source water assessment.

Capacity Development

The new capacity development provisions require adequate technical, financial, and managerial resources from water systems. This has been promoted and, to some degree, already required under the DOH's water system planning and financial viability programs. There are no significant changes anticipated to what is already being done, other than expansion.

Operator Certification

During 1995, the Washington State Legislature enacted an agency request bill (E2SSB 5448) that brought more systems under state operator certification requirements. The new federal laws, requiring EPA to work with states and their existing programs, should allow a transition time to

minimize the impact to Group A systems currently not required to have certified operators. The SDWA also provides an opportunity for reimbursement of certain training and certification costs for small system operators via pass-through grants to states.

Consumer Information

DOH has always encouraged customers to obtain water quality information directly from their water systems and has provided water quality data when readily available. The new requirement for annual consumer reports puts water systems in a proactive role, which a number of water systems have already assumed.

Water System Funding

DOH intends to take full advantage of federal funds offered to states to provide financial assistance under the SRF program. DOH staff have been assisting EPA in developing implementation at the federal level, and have begun coordination efforts with the Public Works Board for Washington's program. However, some of the federal funds require state match.

Surface Water Treatment Rule (SWTR) Exception

A few of our state's utilities using surface water are going to benefit from the new exception to the filtration requirement. The new amendments allow states, on a case-by-case basis, to set treatment techniques as an alternative to filtration (as required under the SWTR) for systems with controlled watersheds, if the alternative ensures greater public health protection than filtration and disinfection.